

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Program 1.5**

**Question No. 121**

**Senator Boyce asked the following questions at the hearing on 18 October 2011:**

1. The National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework recognises the need to ensure that all levels of the justice system responds effectively to the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Although implementation of actions relevant to the strategy falls to State and Territory Governments, the Commonwealth has a significant role to play.

Would you please outline how you measure whether the justice system is responding effectively to the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

2. I'm trying to understand how the mechanics of the framework works. For example, say if a State introduces a program which has outstanding results, how do the other States and Territories learn about that program; ie how is the strategy coordinated between all levels of the justice system?
3. The Department is currently evaluating a number of initiatives under the Framework including:

Namatjira Haven – Drug and Alcohol Healing Centre (NSW)  
Dthina Yuwali – Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drugs Program (NSW)  
Aggression Replacement Training (Qld)  
The Salvation Army Trust – Towards Independence Warrondi Program (SA)  
Koori Cognitive Skills Program (Vic)

Would you make the results of those evaluations available to the committee please?

4. Does the Department provide the results of these evaluations to all State and Territory Governments so they can see what programs are getting the best outcomes, what programs are successful and not so successful?

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

1. The National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework (the Framework) recognises that mental health issues and alcohol and substance abuse contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

As States and Territories are responsible for implementation of the actions in the Framework, identifying appropriate measures of the justice system's effectiveness in addressing the mental health needs of Indigenous people is also a matter for State and Territory governments.

The Commonwealth does have a role to play in terms of coordinating an evaluation of the Framework. In 2012 the Standing Council on Law and Justice will agree terms of reference for an external evaluation of the Framework, scheduled to take place in 2013-14.

Measurement of the effectiveness of the justice system in responding to the mental health needs of Indigenous people may be considered as part of the external evaluation of the Framework.

2. There are several mechanisms which enable jurisdictions to share information about successful Indigenous justice initiatives including:
  - the **Good Practice Appendix** (GPA) attached to the Framework is a publicly available document outlining good and promising practice across all jurisdictions. The GPA includes information about each program or initiative and is accessible from the Attorney-General's Department website [www.ag.gov.au](http://www.ag.gov.au).
  - the **Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse** is a collaborative partnership between the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General. The Clearinghouse is an online repository of information which aims to promote discussion and disseminate relevant Indigenous justice information to policy makers and those working in the field. The Clearinghouse is accessible at: <http://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/>
  - the **Indigenous Justice Forums** hosted by National Justice Chief Executive Officers aim to increase national understanding of the most effective policies and programs to reduce the numbers and frequency of contact with the justice system by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Māori people. The Commonwealth will host the 2012 forum.
3. The Koori Cognitive Skills program, Dthina Yuwali – Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drugs Program and the Aggression Replacement Training initiative are part of tranche one of evaluations occurring under the Framework. These evaluations commenced in December 2010 and are scheduled for completion in December 2012. The two year evaluation period has been designed to ensure adequate assessment of the impact of the programs on participants' behaviour. Once the reports have been finalised, the approval of the Commonwealth Attorney-General and the Attorney-General of the relevant jurisdiction will be sought to release them. The Government expects to be able to make the final reports of the evaluations publicly available so that the findings can be utilised as broadly as possible.

The evaluations to assess Namatjira Haven – Drug and Alcohol Healing Centre and the Towards Independence Warrondi Program are part of tranche two of evaluations under the Framework, which have just commenced. These evaluations will also occur over a two year period and are scheduled for completion in October 2013. As with tranche one, the Government expects to be able to make the findings publicly available.
4. The findings of the evaluations will be shared with all jurisdictions through the Standing Council on Law and Justice.